

Staying Mentally Well. Part One:

Recognizing the Need for Help in Dealing with Anxiety, Depression and Suicide

Staying strong and resilient is important in these uncertain times. Recognizing challenges to members' mental wellness can be especially difficult since communication now is most likely taking place remotely - over the phone, by email or text - and not in person. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is there a change in the member's attitude more than expected given the current situation?
- Are they late for calls, miss calls, say they forgot about the call? Is this behavior different than their usual behavior?
- Do they not return calls or texts like they usually would?
- When you talk to the member, do they seem uninterested?
- Does the member seem to be avoiding talking with you or answering questions?
- Do they seem lonely or isolated?

The above scenarios may indicate the member is experiencing mental health issues.

Below is guidance useful to follow when talking with members about anxiety, depression and suicide.

ANXIETY

Anxiety is an expected part of life. You might feel anxious when faced with a problem at work or at home, or before making an important decision. For a person with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time. The symptoms can interfere with daily activities and with relationships.

Signs to look for include:

- Feeling restless, wound-up, or on-edge
- Being easily fatigued
- Having difficulty concentrating; mind going blank
- Being irritable
- Having muscle tension
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Having sleep problems, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, restlessness, or unsatisfying sleep
- Heart palpitations, a pounding heartbeat, or an accelerated heartrate
- Sweating
- Trembling or shaking
- Sensations of shortness of breath, smothering, or choking
- Feelings of impending doom
- Feelings of being out of control

Questions to Ask to Ensure Mental Wellness:

- "During the past three months, did you experience more days feeling worried than not?"
- "Are you having problems getting to sleep or staying asleep?"
- "Are you having a hard time concentrating lately?"
- "Are you feeling more tense than usual?"

Advice to Member: What to Do:

- Reach out to a friend or religious or spiritual advisor.
- Contact your doctor or mental health professional.
- Go to a hospital emergency room.

DEPRESSION

Depression affects how you feel, think, and handle daily activities, such as sleeping, eating, or working. Depression is a serious medical illness with many symptoms, including physical ones.

Signs to look for include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness, or pessimism
- Irritability
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Moving or talking more slowly
- Feeling restless or having trouble sitting still
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Aches or pains, headaches, cramps, or digestive problems without a clear physical cause and/or that do not ease even with treatment

Questions to Ask to Ensure Mental Wellness

- “During the past two weeks, have you been feeling hopeless or down?”
- “Are there times when you have suicidal thoughts?”
- “How would you describe your energy level?”
- “Do you avoid talking to others? Do you just not feel up to it?”

Advice to the Member: What to Do

- If you are thinking about harming yourself or attempting suicide, tell someone who can help immediately.
- Call your doctor.
- Call 911 for emergency services.
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency room.
- Call the toll-free, 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255); TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)

SUICIDE

Suicide is a major public health problem and a leading cause of death in the United States. Suicidal thoughts or actions are a sign of extreme distress and an alert that someone needs help.

Signs to look for include:

- Talking about wanting to die or wanting to kill themselves
- Talking about feeling empty, hopeless, or having no reason to live
- Making a plan or looking for a way to kill themselves, such as stockpiling pills
- Talking about feeling trapped or feeling that there are no solutions
- Feeling unbearable pain (emotional pain or physical pain)
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Using alcohol or drugs more often
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Talking or thinking about death often
- Displaying extreme mood swings, suddenly changing from very sad to very calm or happy
- Giving away important possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family

Questions to Ask to Ensure Mental Wellness:

- “How are you dealing with situations in your life?”
- “Do you think you might hurt yourself?”
- “What are your thoughts about your future?”
- “Do you feel like life is not worth trying anymore?”
- “Do you think about suicide?”
- “Do you have a plan on how or when you might kill yourself? Do you think about it?”

Advice to the Member: What to Do:

- If you are thinking about harming yourself or attempting suicide, tell someone who can help immediately.
- Call your doctor.
- Call 911 for emergency services.
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency room.
- Call the toll-free, 24-hour hotline of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255); TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)

Sources:

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